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# *The Army's EO Program and Policies*



## Lesson 10: Conflict Management

# Overview

- Define conflict.
- Explain the negative connotations associated with conflict situation.
- Define the levels of conflict.
- Describe the sources of conflict.
- Explain the positive and negative factors of conflict.
- Describe the methods for managing conflict.



# Introduction

- During this lesson we will discuss conflict and conflict management.
- Conflict can lead to a variety of communication problems and misunderstandings.
- Conflict in and of itself is neither bad nor good, but in our attempt to deal with conflict, we can set it off to constructive or destructive consequences.



# Introduction (continues)

- The purpose of this training is to help you understand how and why interpersonal conflict can occur and provide you with some strategies for positive or constructive resolution.
- **The Nature of Conflict** - The term conflict was originally defined as "striking at another," "to fight with an enemy or do battle with opposing forces."
  - Later meanings included "being antagonistic," or "a clash between contradictory impulses within an individual."



# The Nature of Conflict

- Conflict is inevitable in any group that is together for any length of time
- Different people will have different viewpoints, ideas, and opinions
- Conflict occurs whenever there is no internal harmony within a person, or whenever there is a disagreement or dispute between individuals



# Negative Connotations

- One of the destructive consequences that emerges from this definition is the negative feelings we associate with conflict.
- When we hear words like ..."war, battle, collision, tension, disagreement, or opposition," we have a negative emotional response that conflict is not only negative, but should also be regarded as dangerous in nature and avoided at all cost.



# Negative Connotations

- Getting angry is a waste of time
- They won't understand me
- I'm afraid of the consequences
- Confrontation is unprofessional
- They will only counter my argument
- It is unfortunate such negative connotations are associated with conflict, because, if properly managed, conflict is highly constructive and essential to cross-cultural interactions.



# Levels of Conflict

- **Intrapersonal Conflict** - is an experience that takes place within the individual.
  - It normally occurs when there is a disagreement between how a person feels about their behavior versus how they really act.
  - For an example, a soldier who feels guilty about telling sexual or ethnic jokes but vigorously participates when friends are around.





# Levels of Conflict

- **Interpersonal conflict** - is experienced between individuals in the same location, e.g., co-workers, roommates, team members.
  - It exists whenever people interact or come together to accomplish a common goal or objective.
  - However their background, personality and experiences, being different, may make attainment of the goal quite difficult.



# Levels of Conflict

- **Intragroup conflict** - is defined as conflict between groups in the same organization or command.
  - It occurs whenever there is contact or interaction between groups.
  - Sources of intergroup conflict often are caused by issues of group cohesion, "sticking together, leadership and status, power or influence and lack of or limited resources."



# Sources of Conflict

- Trying to identify or determine the cause of conflict is sometimes difficult to analyze.
- Heightened emotions or bad feelings may cloud the real cause of any conflict and detract participants from examining the facts.
- The cause of conflict can also have multiple factors which makes it difficult to isolate just one cause.
- The following is a list of common causes in conflict situations:



# Sources of Conflict

- Different Values and Beliefs
- Role Pressure or Clarification
- Perception Differences
- Diverse Goals or Objectives
- Group Status or Identity
- Race, Ethnicity, or Gender Differences



# Sources of Conflict (Continued)

- Personality Clash
- Limited Resources
- Disagreements on how things should be done
- Personal, Self, or Group Interest
- Tension and Stress
- Power and Influence



# Characteristics of Negative Forces

- Many believe the negative characteristics of conflict occur because group members become closed minded to any compromises.
- It often occurs when someone wants his or her own way.
- Hostility among group members is normally followed by assumptions of competition, that someone will win and someone will lose.
- These negative forces have destructive consequences.
- The following are some examples:



# Negative Factors of Conflict

- Diverts attention from important issues
- May damage morale
- May cause polarization
- Reinforces differences in values
- Produces regrettable behaviors



# Characteristics Positive Factors

## of Conflict

- Earlier we stated conflict was neither good nor bad.
- If viewed as a natural process, conflict is the opportunity to explore and resolve differences in a constructive manner.
- Conflict is constructive when individuals or group members have a new understanding of the functions of healthy conflict and avoid the destructive negative forces.





# Positive Factors of Conflict

- Stimulates Interest
- Forum for discussions
- Increases cohesiveness
- Promotes change
- Provide means to work together



# Strategies For Effectively Managing Interpersonal Conflicts

## • **Methods For Managing Conflict**

- All conflict given the right opportunity and motivation can be resolved, but not always to the satisfaction of all parties.
- The effect of disagreement and the methods for resolution depend on how conflict is managed by the participants.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Denial or Avoidance** - individuals attempt to reduce or get rid of the conflict by denying it exists, both parties shun each other or dodge the issue of disagreement.
  - Individuals refuse to admit the conflict exists or acknowledge it.
  - *Avoidance* can be useful as a constructive tool because it gives people time to think more clearly and come together in a more friendly way after tempers have cooled.
  - *Complete denial*, the conflict does not go away. It grows to the point where other stronger methods are required for resolution.
  - When the issue or time is not critical then denial may be an effective way of dealing with conflict.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Suppression** - "We all get along here," "we run a happy ship," "don't rock the boat," and "nice people don't fight," are the voices of suppression.
  - People who use suppression play down their differences in a belief it is better to "go along to get along."
  - They fail to recognize the positive potential for handling conflict out in the open.
  - Use of suppression may be more effective where it is more important to maintain relationships than to deal with an insignificant issue through conflict.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Power or Dominance** - Power is often used to settle differences.
  - The source of power may be physical, or vested by authority or position. Sometimes this is referred to as "the system" or other higher supervision or management.
  - Power strategies, however, result in a win-lose situation.
  - Normally the loser will not support the final decision in the same way as the winner, and may even attempt to sabotage the decision.
  - Future interactions may cause a conscious or unconscious renewal of the struggle.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Third Party Intervention** - Using this strategy requires a third party that is unbiased and is not taking sides to support either party in conflict. Some assumptions in using a third party are:
  - The third party is trusted or respected by participants.
  - All parties involved will accept the decision of the third party.
  - Third party has the power or authority to rule over the decision.
  - The third party is an expert, has knowledge or is competent to give a decision about the issue(s) in dispute.
  - All parties believe a just and fair decision will be rendered.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Compromise or Negotiation** - Compromise is an agreement between parties about what each should give or get in a particular situation.
  - It is believed all parties will profit from the compromise or at least have a feeling of being treated fairly.
  - In attempting to buffer their loss, the compromised solution is watered down or weakened to the point it is ineffective.
  - Yet there are times when compromise makes sense, especially if there are limited resources and there is a need to prevent a win-lose situation.



# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Compromise or Negotiation** - Negotiation begins when there is an assumption participants are not locked in an adversarial relationship and all are willing to negotiate.
  - The hope is the eventual compromise will result in a better state of affairs for everyone concerned.
  - Negotiation reaches an impasse when one or all participants become set in what they are willing to give and limits have been reached.
  - The compromise, therefore, would allow all parties to reach an agreement with which all would be somewhat satisfied or rewarded.





# Methods for Managing Conflict

- **Integration or Collaboration** - This method attempts to find an acceptable solution that does not necessarily require giving and getting as in a compromised solution.
  - Each individual's position is well-defined and prepared, but the emphasis is placed on resolving the conflict rather than individual view points or positions.
  - The process of integration and collaboration relies on the good faith and all parties have a sincere desire for a positive alternative to resolve their present state of conflict.



# Conclusion

- During this period of instruction we have explored the methods for resolving conflict.
- We have also compared interpersonal conflict with the other levels of conflict, discussed the negative and positive aspects, components of conflict and how it can contribute to individual and group problem solving.
- We examined six strategies for effectively managing interpersonal conflict and the negative and positive attributes of each.

